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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4319  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3142  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9896  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3236  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0337  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2313  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6828  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4692  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001416

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: BATTLE BEGINS FOR SAMPUR AS ICRC SHIP  
REACHES TRINCOMALEE

REF: A. COLOMBO 1399 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1313

Classified By: CDA James R. Moore for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A ground battle for Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-controlled Sampur, south of Trincomalee harbor in eastern Sri Lanka, began on August 27 as an ICRC-flagged ferry bearing 162 expatriates who had been stranded on the Jaffna peninsula arrived in Trincomalee. Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) forces launched air and naval attacks on two LTTE artillery positions in Sampur on August 28 after military sources warned us and other observers that GSL forces intended to neutralize the LTTE's ability to fire on Trincomalee harbor, thus protecting the supply route between the eastern port and Jaffna, and allowing for resettlement of Muslim civilians in the area (ref A). Meanwhile, lower-level artillery exchanges continued on the Jaffna peninsula through August 28, where the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) has warned remaining expatriate humanitarian staff that their equipment may be confiscated. End summary.

Battle Begins for Sampur as ICRC ship arrives  
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[1](#)2. (C) An ICRC-flagged ferry arrived at the eastern port of Trincomalee on the morning of August 27 carrying 162 foreign nationals who had been stranded in Jaffna (reftels) and continued by bus convoy to Colombo. Upon reaching Trincomalee, the boat was delayed in docking for three hours due to exchange of mortar and artillery fire between the SLA and the LTTE in the area, appearing to mark the beginning of a Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) forces offensive on LTTE-held Sampur. Military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe confirmed ten soldiers had been injured in the exchange on August 27.

[1](#)3. (C) Military sources confirm that fighting around Sampur continued on August 28 with Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) Kfir jets and Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) gunboats attacking two LTTE artillery positions and capturing one LTTE camp, according to media. Military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe told the press that the LTTE's artillery positions at Sampur could "paralyze the Jaffna-Trincomalee supply route" and must be neutralized

in order for aid missions to Jaffna to continue. The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) national security webpage stated that security forces had begun "clearing operations" in the area in order to "facilitate the resettlement of Muslims displaced during recent Tiger offenses." Samarasinghe told the press today that the August 28 battle had killed 11 soldiers and injured at least 28. An LTTE spokesman claimed the offensive had killed 20 civilians.

¶4. (C) Sampur is strategically located at the entrance to Trincomalee Harbor. Its status was not defined in the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA). Subsequently, the LTTE de facto occupied the area, which the government does not recognize as LTTE territory. Military and political leaders have indicated, including to PDAS Mann, in recent weeks that a campaign to establish government control of Sampur would be imminent (reftels).

#### Jaffna Needs Additional Supplies

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¶5. (C) Meanwhile, international agency representatives in Jaffna told poloff on August 28 that while the media's focus has shifted from the north to the east, low-level artillery exchange has continued in the Jaffna peninsula since August 11 (reftels). The A9 highway and the commercial runway at Palaly Air Force Base (AFB) remain closed. Press reports confirmed that the LTTE fired on Palaly again last night.

¶6. (C) The ICRC hopes to charter a second boat to evacuate the remaining 350-plus foreign nationals in Jaffna and send additional food supplies, but per a meeting between ICRC Head of Delegation Toon Vandenhove and Charge' on August 28, the

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LTTE seems unlikely to give permission for further sea convoys. LTTE political wing leader Tamilselvan told Toon and Asia Delegate General Reto Meister that additional supply and evacuation convoys should come by road through the Tiger-controlled Vanni. An August 29 GSL press release claimed that periodic ships would continue to carry supplies to Jaffna and rotate humanitarian staff.

#### Explosives Spark Cordon and Search

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¶7. (C) On August 26, police discovered a large cache of explosives at a home in a Colombo suburb, including two 15kg claymore bombs, seven hand grenades, guns and ammunition. Military spokesperson Prasad Samarasinghe told the press that security forces had conducted cordon and search operations in the Colombo area on the night of August 27. Independent radio news claimed 73 Tamils had been arrested in the operations.

#### Minor Gestures

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¶8. (C) The LTTE released a police officer who had been held in custody for over ten months on August 26. LTTE police arrested Officer B.W. Bopetigoda of the National Child Protection Service (NCPS) on October 11, 2005 as he pursued a suspected British criminal into Tiger-controlled territory near the northwest coast of Mannar. Pro-LTTE Tamilnet (August 28) reported that LTTE leadership made the decision to release the officer following outgoing Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) chief Ulf Henricsson's request for a goodwill gesture from the LTTE even as the battle for Sampur began. National Peace Council director Jehan Perera wrote in an August 29 column: "The government's perception that it has the military advantage at this time may account for its lack of enthusiasm to reciprocate possible goodwill gestures, if they can be called such, by the LTTE."

¶9. (C) Meanwhile, the GSL made arrests in a high-profile extra-judicial murder case. Government-owned media on August

28 reported that police arrested two suspects in the December 2004 murder of Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP Joseph Pararajasingham in Batticaloa. Shortly after Pararajasingham was shot as he took Christmas Eve communion in a church within a high security zone (HSZ), investigators discovered two military uniforms near the scene.

#### Monitors

¶10. (C) Norwegian Lars Solvberg will replace outgoing Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) chief, Swedish General Ulf Henricsson, on September 1 to head a 30-member team, after the LTTE refusal to guarantee security for monitors from EU-member nations Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

#### Complications for International Agencies

¶11. (C) Action Contre La Faim (ACF) Operations Director Thomas Gonnet related to Charge on August 25 that Jaffna civil liaison officer Col. Perera reportedly told ACF that if all of its expatriates left on the August 26 ICRC ferry - which they did - ACF would have to close its office, disengage its local staff, and turn over all assets to the military. According to ACF and several of our NGO sources in Jaffna, the Army threatened expatriates that they would not have access to the ICRC ferry if they didn't formally turn over their equipment.

¶12. (C) In an August 28 press conference, GSL spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella attempted to clarify the government's "new policy" towards NGOs, stating, "The GSL has decided that all NGOs should be registered with the Defense Ministry and that all supplies of the NGOs in the north and east be

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temporarily taken over if they decided to pull out of the area... (The equipment) would be handed back to the NGOs in Colombo." The spokesman asserted that the measure would prevent the LTTE from utilizing the equipment.

#### Comment

¶13. (C) Comment: The LTTE's failure to significantly infiltrate the Jaffna peninsula may indicate that the organization is not as militarily strong as analysts believed, though we expect LTTE military engagement and soft-target attacks to continue. The GSL's confidence in its military advantage has led it to push forward an offensive on Sampur, a move by which we are not surprised. Despite this minor reshuffling of the military deck, however, a dearth of initiative and vision remains on both sides for a post-battle political solution. End Comment.

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